MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE USE, STOCKPILING, PRODUCTION AND TRANSFER OF ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION

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Report of the Standing Committee of Experts on Technologies for Mine Action to the Second Meeting of the States Parties

I. Introduction

1. The Standing Committee of Experts on Technologies for Mine Action (SCETMA), established in accordance with the decisions and recommendations of the First Meeting of States Parties (FMSP), which was held from 3-7 May 1999 in Maputo, Mozambique, met in Geneva on 13-14 December 1999 and on 24-25 May 2000.

2. In accordance with paragraph 25 of the final report of the FMSP, it was agreed that Cambodia and France would serve as Co-Chairs of the SCE, with Germany and Yemen serving as Co-Rapporteurs.

3. Representatives of 34 States that have ratified the Convention, 7 States that signed but have not ratified the Convention, 9 other States, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and 8 regional and international organizations, including the United Nations, and numerous other relevant organizations, including national mine action centres, universities, research centres and companies, were registered as participants in the SCE meetings.

4. The meetings of the SCE received administrative support from the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).

II. Matters reviewed by the SCE

5. The SCETMA benefited from a pragmatic and clear mandate as well as a lively and dedicated participation by experts whose diversity and complementarity found full expression in the course of the debates.

6. The SCETMA had been mandated to conduct a comparative survey of the needs of the end-users and of the technologies available to them or in development. The Committee fulfilled its mandate by taking into account the constraints which stand in the way of providing end-users

with appropriate technologies, as well as the new standards required by the technological progress of mine action. This framework provided ample opportunity to field practitioners, program managers, specialists from Academia and research establishments as well as military and industrial decision-makers, to interact and to exchange information. This provided a better understanding of the adequacy of technologies currently or soon to be available for mine action, of the new international standards that ought to be implemented, and of the most promising progress in technology research.

7. The Committee's work was enhanced by useful contributions by individuals responsible for mine action field work, including individuals from Mine Action Centres (e.g., C-MAC (Cambodia), CROMAC, IND-Mozambique, NCHD-Chad, Monitoring, Evaluation and Training Agency (META) and MAP-Afghanistan, CND-Nicaragua), international organizations (e.g., United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) and non-governmental organizations (e.g., ICBL, Handicap International, Mine Advisory Group, Norwegian People's Aid, GICHD). The military establishments of donor countries and affected States also participated. The scientific sector (e.g., Mechem-South Africa) provided an overview of the ways used to attempt to adapt existing technologies. End-users and the research and development actors, academics (e.g., University of Western Australia, Cranfield University, James Madison University, the European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC)) discussed their own efforts at rationalizing mine action in the face of the diversity of hurdles it has to overcome.

III. Actions taken or in process on the development of specific tools and instruments in order to assist the implementation of the Convention

8. The SCETMA confirmed that taken separately neither manual demining, nor mine detecting dogs, nor mechanical equipment, hold the key to the landmine problem. The key lies in the so called "tool box" approach, wherein these techniques and technologies are complementary, and need to be used in different combinations after a careful review of the conditions and environment of each minefield or mine action program.

9. The SCETMA emphasized different elements of the "tool box" used by different Mine Action Centres, from Cambodia to Afghanistan, Mozambique, Chad, Nicaragua or Croatia. The diverse elements presented reflect varying sets of constraints, ranging from human, geographical and climatic conditions, to financial, organizational or political limitations. Mine Action Centres are well placed to give proper consideration, for instance, to the variety of mines in place in the same area, or to the demands made on the mobility and modularity of teams and equipment, in consideration of different conditions in the field, from waterlogged to arid soils, from sandy to rocky terrains, etc.

10. The SCETMA noted that while the tool box approach is widely accepted, there is room for a variety of opinions on other aspects of mine action in the field. With respect to mine detection dogs (MDD) for example, the experience of deminers in Afghanistan shows that MDDs are fast and effective, provided they are assigned appropriate tasks in area reduction or clearance in low-density mined areas. However, deminers in Kosovo pointed out that it is indispensable to adopt an accreditation procedure in order to guarantee, before and during clearance operations, the quality of dogs supplied. The University of Western Australia suggested "double blind tests" for dogs and supervisors. Universal interest in the MDD tool, and lingering doubts on its proper use, have led UNMAS and the GICHD to launch no less than eight studies to cover every aspect of the MDD technique in the course of the next few years.

11. The SCETMA noted different, but not irreconcilable, approaches to the use of mechanical equipment. Suppliers of heavy equipment stressed its effectiveness if assigned appropriate tasks, from road clearance to vegetation-cutting and other preparations of the field. Practitioners in the field underlined the need for multi-purpose platforms and increased sustainability of the equipment purchased or leased, and for improved procedures for testing in the field. All were in agreement on the necessity to integrate the selection of appropriate mechanical equipment in the early stages of planning for demining.

12. The SCETMA noted exposed concern at the multiplication of databases and information technologies available, and the need to promote compatibility and interconnectednesss. Field workers insisted on the need to preserve an end-user friendly approach. Progress made by the UNMAS Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) was applauded – a system which between the two meetings of the SCETMA was developed and tested in a growing list of mine affected countries.

13. The SCETMA acknowledged the importance of the current exhaustive review of UN norms and standards. End-users will systematically be associated with this process. The new UN standards will also be compatible with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). However, concern was raised regarding the need to identify who will assume the responsibility for implementing these standards and verifying their correct implementation.

14. The SCETMA noted that stakeholders in mine action now realize that the time-lines of scientific innovation and progress and those of demining requirements are not necessarily the same. It was understood that states most active in research and development of new demining technologies do so primarily for military reasons, with less attention to the particular needs of humanitarian demining. This bias, however, was not universal: international (International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)), regional (European Commission JRC), and national institutions do have specific programs or projects aimed at humanitarian demining. All stakeholders agreed to stress the importance of a cooperative approach among researchers, developers, and deminers.

IV. Actions taken or in process to assist in the implementation of the Convention

15. To faciliate the implementation of the Convention, the SCETMA concluded that there is an over-all need to nurture a dual approach in the field of mine action technology, namely: the development of simple, end-user friendly technologies based on improving existing material, as being essential to ease the burden of deminers and to speed up ongoing programs; and, the search for high-tech innovations, as being critical to save lives, time and money in the longer term.

V. Recommendations made by the SCE

16. With a view that cooperation between mine action stakeholders must be strengthened in several ways and at several levels, the SCETMA recommended:

- The exchange of relevant information between endusers, in particular between Mine Action Centres;

- The systematic field testing of new technologies in order (*a*) to provide researchers with a better appreciation of the improvements needed and a better access to data acquired by deminers and (*b*) to increase deminers' awareness and acceptance of new technologies;
- The facilitation of the transfer of equipment through the adoption and implementation of "demining friendly regulations";
- The development of integrated databases such as IMSMA and fostering of the compatibility and interconnection of existing databases;
- Facilitating access to national resources in terms of conventional and digitalized maps, surveys and other relevant documentation concerning mined areas, subject to national regulations and considerations of national security;
- The development of software, using information available in databases, with a view to assist those responsible for mine action in their choice of adapted technologies;
- Setting up of a network of probing facilities and international testing centres;
- Defining common standards for field testing; and
- Defining mechanisms and procedures to allocate new technologies to mine action teams (For example: with respect to its discussion on UNMAS' policy on the use of militaries in mine action, the SCETMA recommended (*a*) that the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action review the way these guidelines are applied on a case-by-case basis, (*b*) that States Parties and donors consider the possibility of training military trainers of mine affected countries, and (*c*) that non-UN mine action stakeholders be urged to apply UN guidelines in all circumstances where the use of the military is an option).